

Ken Ackerman



If anyone could be considered a supply chain veteran, it would be Ken Ackerman. He's been active in logistics and warehousing management for his entire career.

In nominating Ackerman for this recognition, a former Rainmaker had this to say about him: "Ken Ackerman is truly a man for all seasons. He is one of the veteran supply chain practitioners that has helped lay the foundation of the supply chain as we know it today."

Ackerman provides management advisory services to companies throughout the world through the firm he founded, The Ackerman Co. Before entering the consulting field, he was chief executive officer of Distribution Centers Inc., a public warehousing company that is now part of Exel Logistics USA. He has also worked in the management consulting division of Coopers & Lybrand.

Ackerman has been a longtime supporter of industry organizations. He is a founding member of the Warehousing Education and Research Council (WERC) and has served as president of both that group and the Council of Supply Chain Management Professionals (CSCMP), which honored him with a Distinguished Service Award in 1977. He is also the first person ever to receive a lifetime membership in CSCMP, WERC, and the International Warehouse Logistics Association (IWLA).

A graduate of Harvard Business School, Ackerman is the author of hundreds of articles and books on the supply chain and is a much sought-after speaker.

Q You've had a long and distinguished career in supply chain. What has kept you in the profession so long and motivates you to go to work each day?

A My primary talent is writing and teaching. Our company's monthly subscription newsletter, "Warehousing Forum," is a constant work in progress. In addition to providing management advice in supply chain, I lead an executive peer group for [executive coaching organization] Vistage International. All but one of my group members are in other work besides supply chain. Helping others forces me to keep learning and teaching.

Q With your many years of experience in the profession, what has been the biggest change or advancement that you've seen in the industry?

A E-mail has replaced the telephone. I once spent hours on the phone each day—now telephone time is measured in minutes, and sometimes, there are no incoming calls all day. At the same time, written communication replaces the human touch, and that can be

a cause of trouble. A growing number of managers ignore or reject the networking opportunities represented by conferences organized by groups such as WERC and CSCMP, including their local branches. They think they can learn everything needed by using the computer or cell-phone.

Q What is your proudest professional achievement?

A My proudest professional achievements are as follows:

- Developing an Ohio-based family-managed public warehouse into a multistate logistics service provider with a professional management team and an outside board
- Converting that firm from a 100-percent IBT [International Brotherhood of Teamsters] operation to a totally union-free workplace with an employee stock ownership plan
- A career in writing that spans nearly five decades, including a newsletter that's now in its 31st year, several books about warehousing, and bylined articles in *The New York Times* and *Harvard Business Review*.

Q As a consultant, what do you see as the biggest challenges supply chain professionals face today?

A The challenge of change. The younger generation has a different work ethic. Senior management is reluctant to accept sensible changes.

The greatest opportunity is training. Thousands of warehouse supervisors are former forklift operators who were promoted because they are great workers. However, they do not know how to change from doer to leader because nobody has taught them.

Q You've been a very active member of several industry organizations. Why is that important to you?

A All of these have provided a network, and this has allowed me to stay busy as a management adviser without any significant sales effort.

Q What advice would you give to someone just entering the profession?

A Your development as an executive can be closely tied to teaching and learning. If you like to write, start doing more of it and offer your writing to others. If you enjoy presenting and teaching, look for opportunities there. Your ability to develop your replacement is the necessary key to your own promotion. Finally, always act with integrity. If you cannot be trusted, your career will be limited.